

THE POSSIBILITY OF A MEDIATOR

Rev. H. Hofman sr. - Lord's Day 5, Question 15

Psalter 379

Scripture: Matt. 15:21-End

Psalter 220

Psalter 310

Psalter 353

Dear congregation, we ask your attention for Lord's Day 5 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 15:

Question 15: What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?

Answer: For one who is very man, and perfectly righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God.

This question discusses the possibility of a mediator. If we read this question carefully, we must emphasize the word "then". Where *then* must we look for salvation? I hope that it is the question of all of us by experience and that it is a lively question in our hearts.

Question and Answer 13 was: "Can we ourselves then make this satisfaction? By no means; but on the contrary we daily increase our debt," and in Question and Answer 14 it says, "Can there be found anywhere, one, who is a mere creature, able to satisfy for us? None." If we recall these questions and answers of Lord's Day 5, then we come to the conclusion that there is no hope left in man and that we cannot satisfy God's justice.

Thus, congregation, all our possibilities are completely cut off. There is no hope in self. And if in all the world there cannot be found a creature that is able to bring satisfaction for sin and to deliver us from the guilt of sin and the power of sin and of death, whither shall we turn? This is the next question asked by the instructor in the Heidelberg Catechism. "What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?" It would seem that there is no longer room for a question such as this. The way has been closed. We have heard of the impossibilities. We have heard of the necessity of satisfaction. We must satisfy the justice of God and we cannot. We have no right to be delivered from the

power of sin and death, no right to life, unless the justice of God be first completely satisfied, but we can never meet the condition of satisfaction. What an answer the Catechism has given us.

The question now comes to us: Must we then not give up all hope? Is it not absurd at this point to ask this question and to continue to ask, if we know that all possibilities are gone. If we know that all our ways are cut off and the road is closed, is it then right that we continue with this question, "What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?" Is not all hope gone already? It certainly would be if the question meant that we should investigate once more the possibility of salvation on our part. It would be very absurd if we again would try to seek for a mediator and a deliverer on our part. Again, that way is completely cut off.

But, congregation, that is not the intent of the question. As we have heard in the past, the instructor of the Heidelberg Catechism is leading slowly on to the revelation of the full Mediator. It is the intention of the instructor to open the way, not from our side, not from this world, but to open the way from the side of God, to open the way of free and sovereign grace as a one-sided work of God. I hope that this question may arise in our hearts, "What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?" If we know our own carnal hearts, then we determine that the natural man gives up at this point. God will have His justice satisfied, and therefore we must make this full satisfaction, either by ourselves or by another. Temporal faith stops here. The hypocrite says, "This doctrine is hard. Who can hear it?" He goes his own way and tries to keep the law in his own strength. He is trying to satisfy God's justice himself. He goes the way of the Pharisee. He builds the house of salvation on the sandy ground of his own work. He does not agree at all that God's justice cannot be satisfied by himself. He will give it a try. Sometimes he reaches the level of the rich young ruler. "All these things have I kept from my youth up." He is like the foolish virgins mentioned in Matthew 25. They had a burning lamp. They were waiting for the bridegroom and expected to enter in with Him to the feast. But when the bridegroom came, they did not have enough oil and they found the door shut.

Congregation, the doctrine of satisfying God's justice is hard for the self-righteous man. The doctrine of God's Word as stated here in Lord's Day 5--that

we cannot satisfy God's justice by ourselves--is a hard doctrine for the Pharisee. Although they talk about grace, about Jesus, and about the cross of Jesus, they are still building on their own salvation with their own works. How necessary it is to search our hearts as to where we stand. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convince a sinner of his incapability to satisfy God's justice and to agree with it. Those are two different things. We can be convinced of our incapability to satisfy God's justice and still not be in agreement with it. But it is a blessing, a gift, and a work of the Holy Spirit, if, by the experience that we are incapable of satisfying God's justice, we also might be brought in agreement with it, and that we know ourselves as so hopeless and helpless that we really need help. Before the Mediator, before the Deliverer can be revealed, there must be room made in our heart. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring us to our wit's end, so that all our capabilities and possibilities are gone. It is not an easy way, but it is so profitable when we may learn by the light and the power of the Holy Spirit that all our ways must be cut off and that there is nothing in us. That is the lesson in Question and Answer 15--in this whole Lord's Day. There is nothing in us, but all is in Christ. Lord's Day 5 teaches us death in Adam and life in Christ only. Then we see that where temporal faith stops, true saving faith cannot stop. That is the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit. A truly concerned soul cannot stop seeking until he has found. Then the question is taught by the Holy Spirit, "Can we ourselves then make this satisfaction?" and the answer is given from the bottom of our hearts, "By no means; but on the contrary we daily increase our debt."

If persecution comes, temporal faith stops. But the faith which is as a plant of the Holy Spirit planted in the heart has another question. There is a people in the world that cannot give up. The question arises from the heart, "What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?" "It is true, oh Lord, and I agree there is no help, no possibility left from my side. I can't find any righteousness in myself. I cannot deliver myself and keep myself alive. I cannot satisfy God's holy justice, and nobody in the whole world can help me, but oh Lord, is there then another way? If there is nothing in me and nothing in the whole world, what sort of a mediator and deliverer then must I seek for?" This is a question of faith. I may say, and may it be for encouragement, that this question is a question of a great faith. All possibilities are then gone and still we cannot let God go except He

bless us. It is great faith, as we have heard out of Matthew 15. There came a woman of Canaan to Jesus and cried unto Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word." All her possibilities were cut off. There was only one left in her life whom she thought was willing and able to help. It seemed that she had come in vain, but she continued to pray. She was humbled and bowed before Him in the dust, and then to experience, "But He answered her not a word." The disciples came and besought Him, saying, "Send her away; for she crieth after us." I think she heard what the disciples said, but what was the answer of this woman? How did she act? We read, "But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me." At that moment when the Lord Jesus said, as it were, "There is no help for you. I am not willing to help you. I am only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," she came and worshipped Him. She fell down before Him in the dust, so to speak.

Here we see the same thing in this Question and Answer, that when all our ways are cut off and all our possibilities are broken, there is still the question, "What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?" True faith as a plant of the Holy Spirit cannot let go of God. Her prayer became shorter and shorter. First she said, "My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil," and after it seemed that Jesus came against her, then she said, "Lord, help me." If all things are broken down, at the end of our way then we say, "Lord, help me. It is true, Lord, I cannot satisfy Thy justice. I cannot help myself and the world cannot help me, but Lord, wilt Thou help me? Is there another way--not from me, not from this earth--but a way from Thee? Lord, help me." And what was the answer of Jesus? "But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith." What a wonder!

This question we are discussing today, "What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?" is a question of a lively faith, of a great faith. Great faith cannot let go of God. It continues to knock on a closed door. Great faith says, "Lord, help me." Great faith thinks great of God and small of

themselves. Great faith acknowledges all the worldliness in themselves, as this woman did. She said, as it were, "Lord, I am not more than a dog. It is true, I am not worthy of the least of Thy blessings. I have forfeited also a crumb of Thy table, but there are dogs which eat a crumb under the table. Lord, let me be such a humble, worthless, unclean dog." That is a great faith. This question is a question of a sinner who cannot stop, but who continues to seek, to hold on, to supplicate, and to pray. It is a praying people, a people who knock on a closed door, praying in the sense of supplication, like a beggar. They say, like David, "The cords of death held me in deep despair." That is what we experience if we know and agree that we cannot satisfy God's justice. If we experience that all our ways to save ourselves are cut off, then what remains? That the cords of death hold us in deep despair. Then we see one door open. "The pangs of hell, like waves by tempest driven, rolled o'er my soul; by grief and sorrow riven." That is what we see, because it remains as a burden on our soul that God will have His justice satisfied. Then the curse of the law rests upon us. If we cannot satisfy God's justice, then we are damned sinners. Do you know that by experience?

"What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?" David said it with these words: "I turned in my distress to God in prayer. I cried, Deliver Thou my soul, O Lord!" They continue to beg the Lord to open a way for them. "Pity, Lord, my sad condition. I am weary and distressed and weeping. I cannot find rest." Faith is the grace which gives the power and liberty to hold on and to continue in prayer and to seek for a way to escape the well-deserved punishment. Then the soul, notwithstanding all hindrances, keeps wrestling with God in prayer, with much groaning and beseeching, being neither able nor willing to let God go before He blesses him and grants his petition. This we see with Jacob in Genesis 32, "Deliver me ... from the hand of Esau ... And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day ... And he said, Let Me go." But Jacob said, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." This is the case with a soul who cannot find rest in themselves. He continues knocking on the door, begging for His grace, begging for a way of deliverance, for a mediator.

We can say from the previous questions and answers in the Catechism that the conscience is awakened and a man is made restless, desperate, helpless, and poor. He cannot live as he lived in earlier days. There is an inward anxiety which

takes away the bloom of his life, though often he knows not what is the matter. I believe that many are brought to God in this way. Such do not come relying on self-merit and self-worthiness, but as an outcast, as a penitent, as a worm, and as a sinful creature, praying for mercy and continuing to do so. This is the amazing quality which is in faith. Again, temporal faith stops, but faith as a plant of the Holy Spirit continues, and this faith always brings us to the end of our way. It is a soul-emptying grace, making a man a beggar, poor and humbling himself. Do you know something of that soul-emptying grace, that you became nothing, that all your possibilities and all your worthiness were taken away, and that you became before the Lord what you really are?

But it is not the intention of the Catechism to bring to despair, even as it was not the case with the Lord Jesus Christ when He did not answer this woman. It seemed He would cast her away. But His heart was burning with love for her. It was His intention to reveal Himself in His grace, in His mercy, and in His love. Therefore it is so necessary that we are emptied. It is called a soul-emptying grace, when we lose everything from ourselves. But then we may find the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way, as the only Mediator, who has given Himself as a ransom for sinners; then it is Christ only. That is a lifelong lesson--Christ only, and nothing from us. We must be emptied from all our worthiness, so that in the depth of our nothingness, our poorness, our needs, and our helplessness, there is the answer to the question, "What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for? For one who is very man, and perfectly righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God."

Let us first sing from Psalter 310, all stanzas.

Reading this answer of Question 15, "For one who is very man, and perfectly righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God," we must understand that the Catechism here does not yet speak of the real Mediator, but only of the possible mediator. There can be already a little hope in the heart of a knocking sinner, of a beggar at the throne of grace, that there is a possibility to be saved. Oh, a little hope can be so great. I would say for the hopeless and for the needy today, "Continue to knock at the door of grace. Continue to ask this question, 'What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?'" We open the door today for a possible mediator. That is

what the answer says now. It does not say, "The Lord Jesus Christ who has given Himself as a ransom for sinners," but very carefully the door is opened a little. That is also a wonder of God's goodness and grace when in the dark valley of Achor the door is but a little opened for a possible mediator and deliverer. For those who ask, "What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?" the answer is not, "There is not one on earth, neither in heaven." Then it would be lost forever. There is a possible mediator. For those in distress, for those living in the valley of the shadow of death, in the land of darkness, for those knocking at the door of grace, there is a possibility to be saved. From step to step the Catechism reveals this Mediator. It intends to demonstrate in the next Lord's Day the necessity of the incarnation. We cannot stand before God, and God cannot meet us. There must be a mediator. There must be one who stands between God and us. We must seek elsewhere for a mediator and deliverer who can make satisfaction for all that is needful for our deliverance and redemption.

Yes, congregation, now the Catechism starts to talk about a possible deliverer. The Catechism starts to talk about a mediator. What is a mediator? A mediator, in the general sense of the word, is simply a person who mediates between two opposite parties in an attempt to bring them together. Think about it. By the light and the power of the Holy Spirit we know that those two parties are opposite parties. It is the holy, righteous God who is a consuming fire, and it is the lost sinner who has done that which is evil in the sight of God, who never can stand in the presence of God, a lost sinner who is a cursed sinner, a lost sinner who is a damned sinner, a sinner whose eternal destination is nothing but hell and that forever.

For such a sinner, for such an unworthy, damnworthy, and hellworthy creature there comes a Mediator who is standing between him and the holy and righteous God. It is a Mediator who makes everything in order, who takes upon Himself all what we have misdome--all our sins, all our foolishness, all our original and our actual sins, and the curse of the law which rests upon us--but who also satisfies God's justice.

Oh dear congregation, a Mediator stands between two opposite parties. How poor you are if you think to satisfy God's justice by yourself. How poor you are, old and young, if you are not concerned at all about meeting God, if you live

forward in this world unconcerned about your eternal destination, unconcerned as to how you will meet God, how you will stand before that consuming fire. You are on the way to meet God, old and young. Also young people, boys and girls, think about it. Fathers and mothers, older people, we are on our way to stand before God. As a cursed creature, as a sinner, then the fire of God's holiness and justice and His majesty shall consume us, and our place shall be in eternal damnation, in outer darkness, in hell. But there is a Mediator; there is One who is standing between those two parties; there is One who has taken upon Himself all the things that are upon us, and He makes it all in order--"one who is very man, and perfectly righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God."

This Mediator is the God-Man. He is the eternal Son of God, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost. He is very God. We hope to hear more about Him in the future, the Lord willing. He comes from God; He comes from above; He comes from the Father-heart of the God of heaven and earth as a great gift, and in one person He is also very Man. He came so low. We hope to hear next time, the Lord willing, that He came into the flesh. The Son of God, the Mediator, in the fullness of time was born in the cradle of Bethlehem as the great gift of the Father.

That He should be one who is very man was necessary, so that He could bear the sins of His entire Church, those who are given unto Him. He is their Eldest Brother. He is flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. He assumed the human nature out of the virgin Mary to be able to be such a Mediator. We cannot express in human words the wonder of God's goodness that He has given such a Mediator who was willing and able to satisfy God's justice, and that in the place of such sinful creatures. Seeing that Mediator, seeing that King, seeing that Prophet and High Priest, seeing that great Gift of the triune God, Paul said, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift." That was the experience of God's children. That is the experience of this woman, as we have heard out of Matthew 15, when the Lord Jesus Christ helped her. Then it must have been in her heart, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift." Then our heart will be filled with thankfulness when we may hear of this possible Mediator. "Thanks be unto God." To the question of this beggar, "What then must we seek for," there is an answer.

There is an answer for such poor and helpless beggars, for such needy creatures. There is a possible Mediator who is always standing at the right hand of the Father, interceding for His Church here upon earth.

I would say with my whole heart, old and young, continue knocking at that door. Go with this question to the throne of grace. Maybe you say, "My heart is so cold." Oh, that is not the reason that He will not answer. He knows where we are. He knows how cold and how hard our heart is. But He is willing as the only possible Mediator. Stop seeking it in yourself. Stop trying to satisfy God's justice by your own work. You need a Mediator who is very man and perfectly righteous. You need a Mediator who is more powerful than all creatures. You need a Mediator who is also very God. And there is one! What a wonder, congregation. There is one. There is such a Mediator. His Name is Jesus. He will save His people from their sins.

Boys and girls, fathers and mothers, old people, go to your homes and bow your knees. Knock at the door of grace and say, "Lord, I have heard that there is a Mediator who is standing between God and me, and His Name is Jesus. Give me Jesus, else I die."

Amen.

Psalter 353:All Stanzas